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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002875

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH PREPARES FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS; ISCI AND  
DA'WA INCREASINGLY DIVIDED

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2857

[B](#). HILLAH 75

[C](#). BAGHDAD 2803

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#). (C) In a series of discussions with Senior Advisor Gordon Gray, leaders of all major Shi'a political affiliations expressed a preference that provincial elections occur in December 2008, though they doubt that the soon-to-reconvene Council of Representatives (CoR) will pass a law in time for elections to take place. ISCI and Da'wa are growing increasingly divided on pre- and post-election strategy throughout the South. The Babil General Elections Officer noted that the northern Sunni parts of his province now have a greater percentage of registered voters than the majority Shi'a areas. End summary.

Everyone says they want December elections

[2](#). (C) When discussing provincial elections, the response among politicians in the Middle Euphrates region is universal: we want elections by December 22; the other parties do not. In separate August 25-26 meetings in Hillah, Da'wa Provincial Council (PC) member Abu Ahmed al-Basri, ISCI representative Sayyid Hafud al-Yassiri, Sadrist PC member Murtada Kamil, and independent Shi'a PC member al-Ameedi expressed variations on the theme. Different opinions were expressed on how quickly CoR might pass a law to enable elections to take place. Al-Basri, a business associate of Prime Minister Maliki from their Syria days and reportedly still a close confidant, estimated that CoR would take until October to pass a law, which might push elections into early [2009](#). In his view, the Kurds and ISCI have the most to lose if an election is held in December and they will use the Kirkuk issue to delay elections as long as possible. No one was confident that a law would be passed early in the CoR session beginning September 9.

[3](#). (C) Basra Province Governor Wa'eli, speaking with Gray on September 2 (ref C), expressed an alternative view. While as a Fadhilah member he supports the provincial elections law draft that passed on July 22, he is most concerned with scheduling by February 2009 a referendum on forming a Basra Regional Government. He admitted that he has no interest in holding provincial elections before a referendum takes place, and, if an election does take place, he believes that the formation of Basra Region would render the results null and void.

Different ISCI Priorities

[4](#). (C) When asked about the most important issue facing the voters, most party officials told Gray that provision of services was paramount. Sadrist and tribal leaders,

including the Dhi Qar and Muthanna sheikhs who met with Gray on September 2 (ref A), are particularly insistent on this point. ISCI representatives in some cases expressed different priorities. In an August 27 meeting in his office, Diwaniyah PC Chairman Khalidi told Gray that providing security was the foremost concern for voters in his province.

Yassiri, an imam who is considered an associate and representative of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, talked of the need to provide services but emphasized the personal reputation of candidates and the strong religious faith of the voters. Yassiri was also the only interlocutor to say that his party supported closed list elections, though he was far from insistent on the point, leaving the impression that he would prefer that voters not know that ISCI favors a closed list.

ISCI and Da'wa  
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15. (C) Da'wa and ISCI representatives offered views that suggested that the ruling coalition members are increasingly moving in different directions. ISCI leaders Yassiri and Khudari said that their party is committed to maintaining an alliance with the Kurds and Da'wa. Yassiri in particular downplayed the role of tribes in the upcoming elections, and accused Sunni tribes in Northwest Babil of displacing Shi'a residents. The imam, like his Sadrist and independent Shi'a colleagues, also strongly criticized the decision by Coalition Forces (CF) to release accused murderer Ahmed Zaki, a Sunni from North Babil with Sons of Iraq connections. (Note: CF have subsequently taken Zaki back into custody. End note.) Meanwhile, Da'wa representative al-Basri accused his governing coalition partners -- ISCI and the Kurds -- of

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working together to try to delay elections and weaken Prime Minister Maliki. Throughout the conversation, he spoke in a manner that made ISCI and the Kurds sound like his party's chief rivals. He also expressed support for open list elections (which will be needed to attract tribal support), spoke strongly about the need to confront Iran, and had a less emotional response to the Zaki case. The differences between Babil's ISCI and Dawa representatives presage more serious splits between the parties, in the province (ref B) and throughout the country.

Voter Registration  
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16. (C) Babil Provincial General Elections Officer Hussein Kulaiff told Gray on August 26 that voter registration is lower than expected but was increasing in the final days before the September 4 deadline. He expects that the province will be ready to hold elections on December 22 if CoR passes a new law during its September session, and that voter registration will increase dramatically once a new law is finally passed. Kulaiff, who is Shi'a, noted that Sunni registration in the northern parts of the province has been outpacing Shi'a registration to the extent that overall Sunni registration is now significantly higher than Shi'a registration. He also noted the difficulty in developing registration procedures for the province's displaced Sunni families, officially estimated at 12,000, saying that the process has revealed that many families are not actually displaced but have claimed that status to receive benefits from the state.

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